

# Walking Away From Ukraine Peace Negotiations Is Not a Solution

By Conrad Black

The repeated Russian missile attacks on civilian populated areas of Ukraine incite the inference that the Russian leader Vladimir Putin thinks that his thoroughly failed campaign to occupy Ukraine and reabsorb it forcibly back into Russia may yet be substantially successful. He must be disabused of that and a viable peace must be imposed.



From left, the national security advisor, Mike Waltz; Secretary Rubio; the Saudi foreign minister, Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud; the Saudi national security advisor, and Ukrainian negotiators at Jeddah, March 11, 2025. Saul Loeb/pool via AP

In general, serious attempts to resolve wars that neither side seems able to win entirely, are resolved by compromises that approximately reflect the correlation of forces on the ground

in the unresolved combat. This is what happened in the cease-fire in Korea in 1953 that is still in effect. And it is what has occurred after each of the wars perpetrated against the right to exist of the State of Israel: 1948, 1967, 1973. And it is clearly the basis upon which President Trump has attempted to bring the parties together in the Ukraine War.

As far as can be discerned from a distance, the Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky essentially insists upon the restitution of the original frontiers of Ukraine including Crimea, which had been part of Russia until awarded to Ukraine by Nikita Khrushchev in 1954. The other frontiers of Ukraine had been created by Lenin in 1919, as Ukraine itself did not exist as a jurisdiction prior to that and was a territory inhabited by Poles, Lithuanians, Russians, and Tatars, and had not altogether, as Mr. Putin never tires of repeating, been homogenized into a distinctive nationality or natural state. This is not, as Mr. Putin claims it to be, a delegitimizing fact, as the same could be said of many countries including Switzerland, many Asian and African nationalities, and possibly even Canada.

The usual governing criterion for the legitimate resolution of disputed borders of a country is the democratically consulted wishes of the contested population of the country – which country do they want to live in? While Mr. Putin has held a few completely spurious referendums in areas he has occupied, as far as can be determined, the entire population of Ukraine prior to Mr. Putin's various assaults upon it, wished to remain in Ukraine and not in Russia.

Because Ukraine's history is so indistinct and because as an independent country it has essentially been a failed state prior to the heroic defense it has conducted against Putin's aggression in the last three years, there is a general agreement among third parties, including at least tentatively, Mr. Trump, that considering Ukraine had been an integral part of Russia and then the Soviet Union for over 300 years, even

though the Ukrainians had clearly opted to secede from the Soviet Union, Russia retained some undetermined rights in what after the dissolution of the Soviet Union it described as the "near abroad," meaning the partially but not completely foreign former republics of the U.S.S.R.

Since the president of Ukraine, who is very heavily dependent on military assistance from North Atlantic Treaty countries, particularly but far from exclusively the United States, to resist the Russians effectively, apparently declines to accept that any territory should be surrendered to Russia and believes that the acceptance of any peace agreement must be dependent upon security guarantees for Ukraine that for the first time would be believable, since guarantees given when it voluntarily gave up along with Kazakhstan and Belarus nuclear weapons inherited from the former Soviet Union proved to be completely worthless, Mr. Trump has publicly considered his requirements for peace to be unrealistic.

And since Mr. Putin appears to think that he can, by raining destruction down on civilian populated areas of Ukraine in the dead of night as long and as murderously as he wishes, force Ukraine effectively to surrender with the acquiescence of America and the impotence of the other NATO powers, it has become necessary to prove to him that he is unrealistic also.

From the beginning of this war, the West understood that it was vital to prevent Russia from humiliating and discrediting the Western alliance and reconquering Ukraine and thus significantly reversing the West's comprehensive and almost bloodless victory in the Cold War. Yet Mr. Trump has also realized that it is a geopolitical necessity to end this war and without compromising Western interests or principles induce Russia away from its currently suffocating state of vassalage with Communist China, as part of the comprehensive reply that the United States is now organizing to meet Beijing's impudent challenge to American primacy in the world.

In these circumstances, it is time for the United States to concert with its principal NATO allies what they consider to be peace terms that assure the sovereignty and security of Ukraine while recognizing some historic and ancestry rights of the Russians, ending this very nasty war and enabling a swift subsequent normalization of relations between Russia and the West. If we did not care about any resumption of civilized relations with Russia, the correct terms would be a cease-fire along the present combat lines; absolutely free plebiscites conducted by acceptable third parties who would need to be functioning democracies themselves, but could not be closely allied with the contending parties, such as Switzerland, India, and several Latin American countries, to determine the wishes of the populations in the currently Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine.

Since this would probably not yield very much, if any accretion of territory to Russia, NATO could be prepared to cede some of that territory from Ukraine to Russia provided there was free movement of population for a year subsequently, with international resettlement assistance and secure military guarantees for the Ukraine that emerged from these arrangements. This war must achieve a durable settlement, and not just be like these wars in the Middle East, a new installment in permanent conflict.

When Mr. Trump has agreed on terms with his NATO allies, Ukraine can effectively be told that if it doesn't accept them, assistance will be reduced to Ukraine; and Russia can be told that if it doesn't accept them Ukraine will be armed with the full ability to visit upon Russia the destruction of civilian areas that Russia has so happily inflicted upon Ukraine. If Mr. Putin starts spluttering threats of recourse to nuclear weapons again, he can be informed that he will receive a nuclear attack, missile for missile, for any that he initiates. It is time to end this war; if that requires knocking heads together, let's get on with it. Just walking

away from the negotiations may be justified, but is not a solution.

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